

PETER RIEDLBERGER, *Philologischer, historischer und liturgischer Kommentar zum 8. Buch der Johannis des Goripp: Nebst kritischer Edition und Übersetzung*, Groningen: Forsten, 2010. Pp. 503, ISBN 978-90-6980-157-5.

This is a first-rate work of wide-ranging scholarship on the final book of a work which was described not so long ago as ‘one of the worst epic poems ever published’, as the editor and commentator himself tells us in his *Vorwort*. R. has given us a very thorough and perceptive study of book 8 of the *Johannis*, the final book of the epic in which Justinian’s general John defeated the Moors in 548. R’s new text is carefully and critically prepared, and his commentary is full, detailed, and judicious. There is a most informative introduction of about 100 pages, and a bibliography of some 500 items, and an index (*Sachregister*) of the many names mentioned and discussed in the book, and of grammatical and other such terms. One feature of the work must be mentioned immediately; as readers of this review may have already noticed, R. opts for the name-form Gorippus, which is seldom even mentioned in reference books or earlier studies; perhaps it was assumed that the familiar name occurred frequently in incipits or explicits to each book, but that is not the case. The rare but vital pieces of evidence are here presented on pages 29–33 of the Introduction, and in this well-argued choice I will follow him in this review. (As for the title, this is less controversial: the suggested (twentieth-century) versions *Iohanneis* and *Iohannias*, noted in the edition of Goodyear and Diggle (ix), are dismissed briefly by R. on pages 74/75).

The introduction first describes the single manuscript on which the text must be based; there are also lost manuscripts, and a handful of lines from other sources. There is then a careful biography of G., necessarily short, and invaluable sections on sixth century Africa; the Berbers; Roman officers; and Johannes and his staff. The second main section of the introduction concerns the poet’s style. R. discusses register and vocabulary, asking if the poem is ‘vulgar’ or ‘late’ in its style; he prefers to stress the poet’s deliberate innovation. While G. imitates classical authors, Vergil of course in particular, he seeks variation here too. R. has an amusing but helpful notion of ‘Baukunstjunktur’ (this means ‘building box’: the poet will choose his components carefully). On this area I have two comments. Sometimes the variations, as they are claimed to be, seem to diverge quite far from the classical intertext; R. speaks of the Vergilian line (A. 6. 853) *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* as being imitated six times, but on referring to the note cited (on line 464) one wonders if they can be considered Vergilian at all (For one thing, there is a

strong Biblical tinge). Secondly, R. is reluctant to give a list of other authors used. Although he asks some very pertinent questions (is the imitation made deliberately? could the poet have thought of a particular *Junktur* himself; should we reckon with the possibility of authors now unknown?), it is a pity that he does not set forth more clearly at least the more likely cases of G. imitating other poets. Even if speculative, such comments can help scholars gain a wider picture of what authors were read in this period. Moving on, one finds in the capacious introduction discussions of the genre of the work and of the question of the poet's source for his detailed information on the war, and the question of whether the word 'propaganda' is appropriate.

The text, critical apparatus, and translation are presented in close conjunction with the commentary, not above it or below it, but in small blocks, of between two or ten lines, on the top right hand side of almost every page, which is most helpful, though the match cannot always be exact, and one does not have the convenience of being able to read the text section by section. Another notable feature is the illustrations, in the form of photographic reproductions: most often these present unclear readings of words in the manuscript, but there are also illustrations of swallows (to clarify a simile), of an imperial bodyguard, and of contemporary altars, important in the liturgical section of the book. In his notes R. discusses all questions of textual criticism and meaning, and many concerning style (especially pleonasm, and the register of words such as *nihilominus*, *necare*); he gives many intertextual parallels, discusses historical questions (Procopius is often quoted, for example on how to fight against a 'Kamelburg'), clarifies topographical matters and religious questions, including discursive notes on Ammon and Gurzil (son of Ammon by a cow: polemic is certainly not absent in this poem, a contest between the good and the bad). Liturgical commentary comes in when the poet narrates the *Feldmesse* preceding the final battle. It appears to be closest to the 'Leonine Sacramentary' (311/2), which, as R. notes, is not a sacramentary, nor related to Pope Leo.

In terms of clarity, scholarship, and thoroughness, this work deserves admiration. Only very, very rarely, was I aware of typographical error (on page 407 (lines 528-9) a line from Book 1. 46 is quoted with the impossible *doleres*); or of a passage where there could have been more attention to a word (perhaps on page 165 (line 87) *diripite* (translated, as it must be, as 'ergreift!')). Unlike his comments on the emendations of others, R.'s own emendations do not always convince: so *montis ab alto* (line 36) or *nostras* (line 533). But something is better than nothing, as the aforementioned Cambridge editors realised when they wryly described their contributions as 'imaginative'.

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